

MAKING DREAMS FROM BITS OF CLOTH

When Jim Henson and Frank Oz created the lovable Muppets for the Childrens Television Workshop and the highly successful children's, educational, TV program, *Sesame Street*, little did they realise what they had in fact created. Starting out with bits of cloth and stuffing, Henson and Oz created characters that have become family favorites – everybody, regardless how old, remembers Oscar the Grouch, Bert 'n Ernie and of course Grover. Obviously a great deal of *Sesame Street*'s success is due to the instant appeal of Henson's Muppet creations.

Realising the potential on their hands, Henson and co branched out into their own TV series, *The Muppet Show*, which during its time became the most popular TV program in the world – reaching millions across the globe. Henson succeeded in tapping the eternal child in us all and characters such as Kermit the Frog, Miss Piggy, Fuzzy Bear and The Great Gonzo rival any modern day film/TV star in stature – in a sense they have become the Tom & Jerry and Bugs Bunny of their day – non-living megastars!

In the meantime Henson was working on a more serious side to the Muppet concept – the creation of truly fantastic creatures. The first serious attempt was Yoda, the 700 year old Jedi master who featured in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Visually striking, Yoda did suffer from the drawback of sounding very much like Fuzzy Bear from *The Muppet Show* – this was because both characters had the same voice, that of their creator/operator, Frank Oz. But Yoda did prove that the concept of using the Muppet creations in a more serious role was indeed viable, something Henson later on confirmed with *The Dark Crystal*, a feature length fantasy which utilised various Muppet creatures.

Labyrinth, the September release from CEL, continues where *The Dark Crystal* left off. A baby boy is kidnapped by the evil Goblin King (played with great gusto by David Bowie) and young Sarah has only 13 hours in which to solve the labyrinth and rescue her baby brother. En route she obtains the help of several good-natured creatures who save her on numerous occasions during her dangerous quest.

The film in itself is a visual tour-de-force. Production designer Elliot



Scott creates a world which is both frightening, yet fascinating to behold, borrowing from many famous fables and myths. One only has to recall the famous pencil rendering of M.C. Escher in one of the film's final scenes set in the room with no up or down, nor left or right, to appreciate the art direction.

The human actors give their all, but they are easily eclipsed by Hen-

son's creations, be it the hordes of Goblins, the grumpy but lovable Hoggle, the powerful but equally gentle Ludo and even Sir Didymus, the gallant, fox-terrier, knight. As with Yoda, *The Dark Crystal* and even the Lewis Carroll creations in *Dreamchild*, *Labyrinth* has proved conclusively that the Muppets can have a serious side – long gone is that basic inherent 'Muppet cuteness'.

Just for those of us who are statistically minded, the forest surrounding the Goblin city consisted on 40,000 sprays of artificial leaves, each individually fastened to each tree; 120 truckloads of tree branches; 1200 turfs of grass; 850 pounds of dried leaves; 133 bags of lichen and 35 bundles of 'old man's beard' moss. All this from a couple of men with some shaggy bits of cloth and imagination!